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Promotion and protection of the rights of children: promotion and protection of the rights of children

Security Council
Sixty-ninth year

Identical letters dated 18 September 2014 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

On instructions from my Government, I wish to convey to you the position of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic regarding the heinous crime that was committed against Syrian children in the countryside of Idlib governorate:

On Tuesday, 16 September 2014, Syria was the victim of a crime, indeed, a humanitarian catastrophe. This catastrophe came about through the connivance of fictitious health institutions affiliated with armed terrorist groups and the Turkish Government, and resulted in the death of 15 innocent Syrian children. They died after they were given expired, contaminated and poisoned measles vaccine that was obtained from unknown sources. The incidents occurred in Ma'arrat Nu'man in the countryside of Idlib governorate, which is located in the northern part of the Syrian Arab Republic. In addition, dozens of innocent children suffered from asphyxiation as a result of this crime against humanity.

Over the past three years, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, in cooperation with the World Health Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and national non-governmental organizations, has carried out scores of vaccination campaigns throughout Syria in response to numerous epidemics and against several lethal diseases, such as polio, typhoid and others. Ministry of Health staff demonstrated their dedication by conducting a national vaccination campaign against polio, which is widespread in those areas where foreign terrorists are present, and they succeeded in stopping this epidemic. Many members of these national medical teams were treacherously shot dead by terrorists as they carried out their honourable national duty.

These vaccination campaigns were completely successful owing to the dedication of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, acting through the Ministry of Health, and thanks to the commitment of health and education workers,

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good execution, love of country and the Government's assiduity in shouldering its responsibilities, including its responsibility to provide sound health care to Syria's children. Anthony Lake, the Executive Director of UNICEF, and other United Nations officials have commended these campaigns in many of their statements.

The Syrian Arab Republic condemns this heinous crime that was committed against innocent Syrian children and reiterates that it is fulfilling the pledges it had repeatedly made through official channels and in international forums, including its pledge to protect and foster the rights of the child. It also reaffirms that it will spare no effort to meet the medical needs of the residents of those parts of Syria that are near the Turkish border and have been devastated by the terrorists and their proxies. This includes ensuring that national vaccination campaigns reach those areas, in cooperation with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and the relevant international organizations that are operating in Syrian territory. It should be borne in mind that vaccines must be administered to children in accordance with strict technical standards and conditions, and that the administering medical teams must possess the required skill and experience. In Syria, only the Ministry of Health of the Syrian Arab Republic has staff with such skill and experience.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic calls on the United Nations and its agencies to comply with their commitments, particularly under Security Council resolution 2165 (2014), commitments that require them and their implementing partners to inform the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic of their plans and activities before using roads that cross conflict lines or the international border crossings of Bab al-Salam, Bab al-Hawa, Ya'rubiyah and Ramtha, in order to ensure that humanitarian aid, particularly medical and surgical supplies, reaches the civilians across Syria who need it. The monitoring mechanism must observe the loading of all relief convoys deployed by United Nations humanitarian agencies or their implementing partners at all relevant United Nations facilities. It must also observe any inspection of convoys by customs or medical authorities in the concerned neighbouring States before their entry into Syrian territory. In accordance with the 2014 humanitarian response plan, United Nations partner agencies must systematically monitor the humanitarian response and ensure compliance with international and Syrian humanitarian and medical standards. They must publicize their findings in order to guarantee that the outcomes and commitments set forth in the plan are realized in an accountable manner. Vaccinations are one of the priorities of the plan.

The leaders of the armed terrorist groups and the Turkish authorities that backed them all bear responsibility for this disaster, as does everyone who aided or facilitated the process. The international community must clearly and explicitly condemn this despicable act. The armed gangs have plainly violated international law and human rights conventions, particularly those regarding the rights of the child. The perpetrators have proved disgracefully ignorant of the principles and conventions underlying humanitarian work and the practice of medicine.

The drugs and vaccines in question may not be used anywhere in the world without prescription or specialist supervision; yet they were handed over to simpletons who lack the most basic knowledge of medicine or nursing. The unsafe use of such substances represents an ongoing danger to our people in the affected areas and a clear threat to public health.

The international community must condemn the unethical and inhumane stance of one of the representatives of the armed terrorist groups in the Turkish city of Gaziantep. The individual concerned has taken a plainly immoral approach to this harrowing tragedy by promising material and moral compensation to the families of the child victims, in a pathetic attempt to cover up the groups' responsibility for their crimes against our proud Syrian Arab people. He forgets, however, that the wounds of a grieving mother cannot be assuaged by pitiful material compensation, and that no price can be set on human life.

The Syrian Arab Republic calls on the United Nations to open an immediate investigation in order to identify the responsible party or parties, including the Turkish officials who facilitated this monstrous crime, which amounts to a crime against humanity. The Syrian Arab Republic is prepared to cooperate with all United Nations agencies with a view to conducting the investigation, bringing the perpetrators to justice, upholding the right of children to proper health care and preventing the terrorists of the twenty-first century from committing such crimes again. The Government calls on international organizations to endorse the national vaccination campaigns and regular targeted visits organized by the Ministry of Health of the Syrian Arab Republic, and to support the Government's efforts to send trained vaccination teams to all affected areas, so that they can protect the children in accordance with stringent medical standards by administering the vaccines approved by the Ministry of Health.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter circulated as a document of the sixty-ninth session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 64 (a), and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Bashar **Ja'afari**
Permanent Representative
of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations